

## Visiting Australia and Working Satellites

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**F**or a very long time, I have wanted to visit Australia. This country has always interested me ever since I was in grade school. I have been a fan of Australian rules football since I first saw it on ESPN in the mid-1980s. A foreign-exchange student from Melbourne (who was also a rabid fan of Australian rules football) attended my high school during my senior year, and we kept in contact after she returned home. And, of course, the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney showed a little slice of Australia that only added to my interest. Add in my satellite operating, and taking my portable all-mode satellite station wherever I've gone since early 2010, and an Australian trip finally became reality in May 2011.

Before I left, I posted to the AMSAT-VK Yahoo! group<sup>1</sup> about my planned trip, and asking questions of that helpful group. I also sent e-mails to several Australian satellite hams. I knew that the Australian Communications and Media Authority<sup>2</sup> (ACMA, Australia's amateur licensing authority) issued a "class license"<sup>3</sup> in 2008 that allows foreign amateurs from many countries on short visits to Australia operating privileges without first applying for a temporary Australian license and call sign. This took care of the radio licensing formalities, and my call sign would be VK/WD9EWK. I read through information from the ACMA and the Wireless Institute of Australia<sup>4</sup>, the national organization for amateur radio in Australia, which was helpful for repeater listings covering Melbourne and Sydney – the two cities I would visit.

My portable all-mode satellite station for this trip is the same station that has gone with me on my trips around

North America. I brought a pair of Yaesu FT-817NDs, a Kenwood TH-F6A HT with its all-mode receiver, a Kenwood TH-D72A HT, an Elk handheld 2m/70cm log periodic, and a 2m/70cm magnet-mount mobile antenna. The radios and most accessories travel in an old laptop bag that I carry. The antennas went in a suitcase that gets checked for air travel. As I drove around Australia, the TH-D72A and magnet-mount antenna would be used on the Australian APRS network.

I left for Australia on the Thursday afternoon before the 2011 Dayton Hamvention (19 May). From Phoenix, this would be almost a full day for travel – a one-hour flight to Los Angeles, seven hours between flights at LAX, then 15 hours on a Qantas A380 double-decker "superjumbo" to Melbourne. Even in the economy section, the A380 was very comfortable for the long flight. Since the LAX-Melbourne flight crossed the International Date Line, I "lost" a day (Friday, 20 May). I arrived in Melbourne on Saturday (21 May) morning. After over an hour going through the arrival formalities at Melbourne Airport, I was driving toward the center of Melbourne in a right-hand-drive Toyota Corolla, my first time driving a right-hand-drive vehicle on the left side of the road. I arrived too early to check into my hotel room next to the huge Melbourne Cricket Ground stadium, so I first went downtown. I walked around the heart of Melbourne, and then drove around the city before checking into my hotel room and relaxing for the rest of the day. I also looked at the satellite passes for the coming week, using the free Satellite Tracker app written by Australian ham Susan Mackay VK3ANZ on my iPod Touch. I would have SO-50 and VO-52 passes in close proximity every morning, with FO-29 and AO-7 passes also available. These

would be the four satellites I would work during this trip.

After spending my first night in Melbourne, I wanted to do two things the next morning (Sunday, 22 May) – get on the radio, and attend an Australian Football League<sup>5</sup> match. The football match did not start until 1pm, so I took the morning to find a good place where I could work the satellites. The center of Melbourne, along the Yarra River and Port Phillip Bay, is surrounded by higher land. I drove east of the city center and found Doncaster Reserve – a city park in an east-side suburb that looks over the center of Melbourne. I parked next to an oval field used for Australian rules football, and set up my station on the roof of my rental car. From this park, I worked VO-52 and SO-50 for the first time.

With the smaller satellite ham population in this part of the world, I came to realize that satellite passes were always round-table conversations. My first VO-52 pass made this clear right away. I heard Mal VK2MAL near Sydney and Graham VK2AYE near the Pacific coast east of the Australian capital, Canberra. I announced my call, and Mal quickly welcomed me to Australia. The three of us had a nice chat for the remainder of this pass. About 20 minutes later, SO-50 passed by. I had a chat with Judy VK2TJU in Sydney, who was the only other station for this pass. With these QSOs in the log, I packed up the radio gear and went to the football match at Etihad Stadium, a large stadium with a retractable roof in the Docklands area west of downtown Melbourne.

My favorite Australian football club, the Collingwood Football Club<sup>6</sup> – also known as the Magpies – was playing the Adelaide Crows from South Australia at Etihad





Stadium. Skies were cloudy over Melbourne, so the stadium roof was closed. While waiting outside the stadium, I talked with some Magpie fans – all of whom were curious how an American becomes a fan of Australian rules football. A couple of them were in the Magpies' cheer squad – a group that sits in one end of the stadium, complete with pom-poms and signs supporting their club. I was able to walk down to the edge of the field, and then onto the field and into the Magpies' locker room under the stadium. After visiting the locker room, I was "drafted" to help hold up a large banner the Magpie players would run through before the match. I was having so much fun, and the match had not yet begun. The Magpies would end up winning the match, and I was able to go back into the locker room after the match. I took lots of pictures, and had some pictures taken with several Magpie players and their head coach. A couple of days after this match, I attended the Magpies' Tuesday morning workout session at their headquarters in the Olympic Park district, the site of the 1956 Summer Olympics southeast of the Melbourne city center.

Over the next couple of days, I did more sightseeing and radio operating. I visited the headquarters of the Wireless Institute of Australia, Australia's national amateur radio organization, and a nearby ham radio store in the eastern suburb of Bayswater. I did not hear anyone on VO-52 during the weekday morning passes I worked, but talked with Mal or Judy on the SO-50 passes while I was in Melbourne. I wanted to work AO-7, and it was in mode B on Tuesday (24 May) afternoon. I parked at another city park west of downtown Melbourne and set up my station. After a couple of CQ calls, Roy VK4ZQ near Brisbane called me. We chatted for several minutes,



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**VK/WD9EWK Station at Doncaster Reserve**



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when Mal VK2MAL joined in for the remainder of the pass. During the pass, it started raining. I covered my radios to keep them from getting soaked. Since there was no thunder or lightning, I was able to finish the pass and have a great chat with Roy and Mal.

Before I left for Australia, I sent Tony VK3JED e-mails about my planned trip. Since I had corresponded with Tony via e-mail for almost a decade, I wanted to meet him in person. He mentioned there was a presentation being given in his city, Bendigo, about the planned Square Kilometre Array radio telescope project<sup>7</sup>. I made plans to drive there - a 2-hour drive northwest of Melbourne - on Wednesday (25 May) morning. After talking with Tony on a 70cm repeater as I approached Bendigo, I met him at a café next to Lake Weeroona near the city center. Later that night, I met him at the radio telescope presentation in Bendigo's Discovery Science & Technology Centre. Even though I only planned to spend one day in Bendigo, this was an enjoyable day before the next part of my trip.

Early Thursday (26 May) morning, I drove back to Melbourne Airport to catch my 90-minute flight up to Sydney. Thanks to weather conditions, the flight into Sydney Airport approached from the north, passing by the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Sydney Opera House in the city center. I was able to take pictures as the flight passed by those landmarks, even as the plane landed and drove to the terminal. After the flight, I drove to my hotel in the city center, and spent the rest of the day walking around that area and nearby Darling Harbour. Friday (27 May) was spent with my high-school friend, getting a tour of the city for the entire day. This left me one more day in Sydney, before I returned to Melbourne for my flight back to Los

Angeles.

On Saturday (28 May) morning, I checked out of the hotel, loaded up my rental car - an Australian-made 2011 Ford Falcon - and spent the day sightseeing. I knew when SO-50 and VO-52 would be passing by that morning, and made sure I was in a good spot for those passes. I drove west of the Sydney city center to Sydney Olympic Park, the site of the 2000 Summer Olympics. I parked across the street from the Olympic stadium - called Stadium Australia during the Olympics, now called ANZ Stadium, used for a wide variety of sporting events and concerts. I set my gear up on the roof of the car, and worked both passes. I had another nice chat with Judy VK2TJU and Mal VK2MAL from their homes in the Sydney area on the SO-50 pass, but worked nobody on the following VO-52 pass. After those passes and a quick breakfast, I drove out to the Blue Mountains west of Sydney for more sightseeing and lunch before driving back to the city for my flight to Melbourne in the evening.

On my way back to Sydney Airport in the mid-afternoon, I stopped to try the one satellite I had yet to work in Australia - FO-29. I found an open field near an exit off the M7 motorway west of Sydney, and set up my gear for the last pass I would work as VK/WD9EWK on this trip. I heard a conversation already in progress - Mal VK2MAL in Sydney (I discovered later Mal lives a few km east of where I stopped!) was talking with Brett VK1AMG in Canberra. I joined in, and the three of us had a nice chat until the end of the pass. After the pass, I packed my gear, and drove to Manly, one of Sydney's famous beaches. After spending some time walking around and taking some pictures, I drove to the airport. After the 90-minute flight back to

Melbourne, I checked into a hotel at Melbourne Airport for the night and my flight home the next morning.

Sunday (29 May) would feel like a very long day. I walked from the hotel back into the airport, where I checked in for my flight and went through the Customs and security checkpoints on the way to the gate. The flight to Los Angeles was on another Qantas A380 superjumbo, which would take approximately 14 hours - including gaining the day I "lost" on the way to Australia. It took almost two hours to clear the US Customs and immigration checks in the international terminal, and then I walked to the terminal for my 45-minute flight back to Phoenix. About 22 hours after leaving Melbourne, I made it home - and all of this happened in one "day".

Even though I did not work the satellites as often as I have done on other trips, I was happy with the chances I had in Australia. I only worked 5 different stations in New South Wales, Queensland, and the Australian capital city Canberra via satellite as VK/WD9EWK. Unfortunately, I did not hear stations in other parts of Australia during this week, nor did I hear anyone from New Zealand. Maybe next time. I made some videos combining the audio from a few of the satellite passes and photos of my satellite gear and other pictures of Melbourne and Sydney, and posted them on YouTube<sup>8</sup> along with another video from one of my crossings of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Thanks to the friendly Australian hams I worked on the satellite passes. I may not have worked as many stations as I had on trips around North America, but these passes were just as fun to work. Thanks to Mal Brooks VK3FDSL and the staff of the Wireless Institute of Australia for



their hospitality during my visit to the WIA headquarters. And thanks to the Collingwood Football Club, for their hospitality at the football match and later at their training facility. I could not have planned that any better! It took a long time for me to make my first trip to Australia. This won't be my last trip!

## Notes

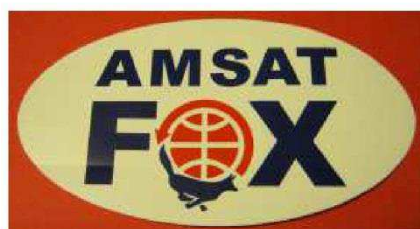
1. AMSAT-VK Yahoo! group:  
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/amsatvk/>
2. Australian Communications and Media Authority: <http://www.acma.gov.au/>
3. Text of Australian "class license" for foreign amateurs visiting Australia: <http://www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/F2010C00893>
4. Wireless Institute of Australia: <http://www.wia.org.au/>
5. Australian Football League: <http://www.afl.com.au/>
6. Collingwood Football Club: <http://www.collingwoodfc.com.au/>
7. Square Kilometre Array radio telescope project: <http://www.skatelescope.org/>
8. WD9EWK/VA7EWK YouTube videos: <http://www.youtube.com/va7ewk> 🌐



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